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Spain

Biotechnology

Biotechnology Update

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Report Highlights:
During the past few months, in addition to the advances made by the Government of Spain regarding biotechnology policy[1], we have seen three new studies reported that have generated positive national media coverage about biotechnology. The reports and subsequent media coverage will likely help sustain and further develop a positive image of biotechnology among Spanish farmers and consumers. (JT16SH3)

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[SP]

Much of the media coverage was tied to a study about all facets of biotechnology and biotechnological research, including human health, waste disposal, and agriculture. The report titled: *Biotechnology in Spain: Economic Impacts, Evolution and Perspective*[2] was produced by Genoma España[3]. Please see the summary below:

- Spanish consumers are consistently more accepting of biotechnology than are consumers in other European countries;
- A gap exists between the amount of biotechnology research currently conducted in Spain and the number of patents awarded for applied biotechnology applications;
- Currently the biotechnology industry in Spain is small. According to their projections, it will take 50 years for Spain to reach the current investment level of the United States; and,
- Agro-biotechnology is projected as becoming the fastest growing segment of the biotechnology market in Spain over the next ten years.

Also, the agricultural news site, Agroinformacion.com, recently carried two articles that highlight the potential economic benefit of biotechnology in agriculture and the ways in which agro-biotechnology could help Spain deal with problems such as erosion, the rising cost of gasoline, the current drought and more generally the limited rainfall over much of Spain. The Iberian Peninsula (IP) is experiencing its most severe drought in 60 years[4]. This has brought widespread attention to the fragility of the Spanish agricultural system and has caused many to rethink biotechnology crops as a possible solution. The two following reports (summaries below) focus on why biotechnology is good for Spain and the specific problems it can help address in the future.

The first, dated June 6, 2005, and produced by Fundación Antama is titled, *The Role of Biotechnology in Sustainable Agriculture*[5]. This report cites studies by ISAAA[6] and also NCFAP[7] and asserts that agro-biotechnology can eliminate the use of 32 million pounds of insecticides and herbicides, as well as 5.4 million gallons of fuel in an average year. The rest of the report has specific sections related to the potential for Bt corn and Bt cotton in Spain.

The second of the reports from Agroinformation.com is titled, *No-till and Biotechnology. A Synergy of the Future for Spanish Agriculture*[8]. This report was released on October 10, 2005, and cites Monsanto (among others) as contributing to the report. The article details the ways that planting no-till Roundup Ready crops can save Spanish farmers time and money. The first section of the report uses quotes and graphs to explain how the combination of no-till practices with Roundup Ready varieties of soybeans has already been used very effectively in many countries including Argentina, United States, and Canada. While soybeans are not currently produced to any great extend in Spain, the biotechnology benefits in soybeans might have implications for corn and cotton production.

The end of the article contains a list of the ways that this combination of technologies could help Spain:

- Water is the most limiting factor in Spanish agriculture; these technologies help hold water in the soil;
- The conditions in Spain are ideal for erosion and these technologies work together to prevent erosion;
- The percentage of organic material in much of Spanish soil is very low. No-till methods of agriculture allow organic material to remain in the soil, enhancing fertility and water retention capacity; and,
- Rising fuel costs make each pass over a field very expensive. The ability to decrease the amount of time equipment is running will save the producer labor and fuel costs.

References:

[1] More information about the most recent biotechnology developments in Spain and Portugal can be found in the following reports: SP5021, SP5022, SP5023.

[2] *La Biotecnología Española: Impacto Económico, Evolución y Perspectivas.* Available at: http://www.gen-es.org/02_cono/docs/BIOTECN_ESPA.pdf

[3] A public-private partnership founded in 2001 with a presidency that alternates between the Minister of Health and Consumer Affairs and the Minister of Education and Science.

[4] More details about the drought and its effects on Iberian agriculture can be found in these other FAS reports: PO5018, PO5008.

[5] *The Role of Biotechnology in Sustainable Agriculture.* Available at: http://www.agroinformacion.com/leer-noticia.aspx?not=22798

[6] The International Service for the Acquisition of Agro-biotech Applications

[7] National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy

[8] *No-till and Biotechnology. A synergy of the Future for Spanish Agriculture.* Available at: http://www.agroinformacion.com/leer-articulo.aspx?not=482